

**When Your Boss Supports You During Your Internship:
The Impact Co-op Supervisor Support
on Engineering Students' Attitudes and Career Outlook**

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The final steps in the undergraduate engineering education process often involve 'field education,' 'clinical experience' or 'co-op' assignments. In many cases, engineering students rate the capstone engineering practicum experience as the most important aspect of their engineering professional preparation.

Based on social learning and organizational support theories, we used a sequential exploratory mixed methods research approach to explore the experiences of 181 engineering students, attending two large public US universities, and participating in their co-op experiences. In interviews, co-op students identified support, coaching, sponsorship and challenging work tasks as important aspects of successful co-op experiences. After identifying and amplifying these key themes through a qualitative research process, we used a survey to examine issues identified in interview settings, in relation to these novice engineers' attitudes and career outlook. Supervisors' perceptions of the engineering students' motivation, commitment, and performance were also measured.

Study findings indicated that very early career engineers are often strongly influenced by their experiences with their co-op supervisors. The implications for the study emphasized that, when supported their supervisors, engineering co-ops (and similar engineering capstone experiences) facilitated by supported supervisors, can impact students'/employees' performance, career outlook (regarding their long-term interest in the engineering profession) and overall attitudes regarding engineering as a college major and as a profession and life-long career.

Methods used: exploratory mixed-methods—interviews and survey
Analysis used: constant comparative analysis and structural equation modeling

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